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Chairman: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 109: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/54/3, A/54/38/Rev.1, A/54/98, A/54/123-E/1999/66, A/54/124, A/54/156-E/1999/102, A/54/156/Add.1-E/1999/102/Add.1, A/54/224, A/54/225, A/54/341, A/54/342, A/54/352 and A/54/405)

Agenda item 110: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*) (A/54/124, A/54/264 and A/54/354)

1. **Ms. Arnon** (Israel) said that, as a country of immigrants, Israel had to deal with special problems relating to the advancement of women since women from different societies did not make the same demands or have the same needs as they struggled to integrate into Israeli society.

2. Despite that obstacle, Israeli women had made significant progress. Legislation to ensure gender equality had been adopted, including the Women's Equal Rights Laws of 1951 and the Equal Employment Opportunities Law of 1988. The latter, which prohibited discrimination in the workplace on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, marital status, race, religion, nationality, country of birth or political or other orientation, also contained provisions requiring the adoption of protective measures for women with children and prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace, as a form of discrimination subject to civil and criminal sanctions.

3. In 1998, the Israeli Parliament, after a long legal process, had adopted new legislation intended to advance women's status, prevent violence against women and give the Government the necessary means to those ends. The first step in implementation of that legislation had been the establishment in March 1998 of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, which was composed of representatives of various ministries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academic experts and whose policies, once approved by the Government, were binding on all government offices. The Authority supervised governmental adherence to its policies and dealt with complaints lodged with it; thus, it provided assistance to working women and encouraged the appointment of women to decision-making posts. Recently, public outcry at the light sentences imposed on men convicted of violence against women had led to the adoption in early 1999 of legislation mandating minimum sentences in such cases.

4. In addition to those legislative measures, other steps had been taken to assist the victims of sexual violence: a recent amendment to the Penal Code acknowledged a woman's right to defend herself against her attacker and broadened the definition of self-defence; the National Health Law provided coverage of any and all medical expenses incurred by women as a result of sexual or physical abuse; 12 shelters for battered women had been established throughout the country, and help centres provided 24-hour emergency hotlines and individual and group legal services. Lastly, the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law, enacted in 1998, was one of the most advanced in its field; it addressed all forms of harassment (written, oral, physical and even through the computer) in many situations of authority and dependence.

5. The continuing dire condition of women in several developing countries, particularly in terms of equal access to education, vocational training and employment, required a radical change in attitudes towards women. The Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre in Haifa played an important role in that regard. It held practical training courses and workshops throughout the year for participants from all countries, particularly developing ones. To date, over 7,000 trainees had taken part in those programmes. Over the years, the Centre had expanded its activities, focusing on human resource development, in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. During the past five years, for example, it had offered courses on issues such as "women and microenterprises" and "leadership skills and strategies". Under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), it had been involved in the implementation of projects in Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire and had cooperated with various training workshops.

6. There had been many positive developments in the status of women during the last decade, but much remained to be done. Her Government, for its part, was committed to doing its utmost to improve the status of Israeli women, drawing on the experience of other countries and sharing the results of its own experience.

7. **Mr. Albin** (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group and of Mexico, said that the countries members of the Rio Group were very interested in the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly to be held in June 2000. They had, *inter alia*, replied to the questionnaire sent to them and to all Member States on implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and had made national bodies, composed of government officials and representatives of NGOs and other organizations of civil society, responsible for assessing the effectiveness of their activities to promote gender equality.

8. The countries members of the Rio Group welcomed the success of the active negotiations on the development of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the recent ratification of the Convention by the Republic of Vanuatu; it hoped that the entry into force of the Protocol would strengthen the mandate of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and give new impetus to the advancement of women.

9. They also welcomed the appointment of the Director of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), which would allow the Institute to continue to fulfil its mandate as recommended by the Joint Inspection Unit. In that regard, he stressed that it was important for the Institute's high-level administrative and staff posts to be funded from the regular budget of the Organization so that the Institute could maintain staff stability and have less recourse to fixed-term contracts, which did not provide adequate career prospects and were dependent on voluntary contributions.

10. In the Veracruz Statement, the countries members of the Rio Group had solemnly declared that the States of origin and destination of immigrants were responsible for strengthening cooperation on migratory issues, and for ensuring full respect for immigrants' human rights and social and economic welfare. They therefore joined in the appeal for prompt ratification by United Nations Member States of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families and hoped that the eight ratifications required for its entry into force would soon be obtained.

11. Speaking on behalf of Mexico, he said that his Government hoped that at the special session of the General Assembly to assess progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, to be held in June 2000, the Assembly would adopt a political declaration reaffirming the commitments made at the Beijing Conference and the meaning thereof; prepare a negotiated document on evaluation of follow-up to the Platform for Action; establish measures to be taken in order to ensure the full, complete implementation of all recommendations made therein; and request that the evaluation of the World Summit for Social Development and the work of the Millennium Assembly should be carried out from a gender perspective.

12. In regard to the advancement of women, the Mexican Government was fully prepared to take account of the recommendations made by the Committee on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women upon consideration of its third and fourth combined periodic reports on the implementation of the Convention.

13. It attached great importance to improving the situation of women in rural areas and had responded to the Secretary-General's requests for information on policies it had implemented to combat the poverty of such women and on its education, health, nutrition and employment programmes promoting their participation in development.

14. As noted in its response to the Secretary-General, his Government was increasingly concerned about violence against female migrant workers. In addition to the efforts it had made to assist them, which were described in the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/342), it had, with the help of a non-governmental organization, published a brochure entitled "Migrant women", which informed the latter of the steps they should take if they were the victims of sexual harassment. It also provided them with the addresses of organizations which might be of assistance to them.

15. **Mr. Jassim** (Bahrain) said that his country was convinced of the importance of the role of women in society and followed the progress made in promoting their status in Arab States and the rest of the world with great interest. Believing that it would be detrimental to society to deprive Bahraini women of their rights and freedoms, his Government had implemented a number of measures to ensure that they could participate effectively in the economic and social life of their country and contribute to its development. Accordingly, it had elaborated plans and programmes to ensure the participation of women in various fields, including education, health and social affairs; establish population plans for women as well as men; established mechanisms and national committees to enable women to participate in elaborating development strategies and resolving development problems; and set up a national committee to monitor the follow-up to the major world conferences on women.

16. Bahraini women had been admitted to State schools ever since their foundation in the 1930s and had since played an active role in a wide range of economic and social fields, with the support of the public and private sectors. They now enjoyed the same rights and benefits as men. As to their situation in the labour market, various laws encouraged them to take up a job, and the female employment rate in 1998 was 33.5 per cent in the public sector and 20 per cent in the private sector. With regard to the situation of women in rural areas, it should be noted that the Bahraini population was extremely urbanized and that there were no rural areas as such in Bahrain.

17. His Government hoped that all States would exert maximum efforts and mobilize a maximum of resources to encourage women to assume the role they were due in society. It urged women's rights organizations and institutions to redouble their efforts to build a non-discriminatory society in the twenty-first century.

18. **Mr. Osman** (Malaysia), speaking on agenda item 109, said that women were certainly a group whose contribution to society should not be overlooked.

19. His Government was continuing to expand the role played by Malaysian women in socio-economic development and to enhance their participation in society. In 1996, it had formulated a national plan which aimed, *inter alia*, to strengthen institutions for the advancement of women, to sensitize the public and government bureaucracy to issues related to women, and to mobilize non-governmental organizations. The plan covered issues such as women and the family, education and training, legal matters, power-sharing and the participation of women in decision-making, women and the media, women and religion, women and culture, and women and sports.

20. The Government had taken various measures to enable more women to participate in the economy and labour market. For example, employers who made child-care centres available at or near the workplace were accorded tax exemptions and businesses had been encouraged to provide proper housing to the rural migrants who worked for them, the majority of whom were women, or to provide assistance in finding housing. Moreover, in order to encourage more women to enter into business, the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development had elaborated various entrepreneurial training programmes.

21. His delegation was convinced that the empowerment of rural women was crucial to the eradication of poverty and welcomed the recommendation contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/123) that the political and socio-economic empowerment of rural women should be pursued by supporting their full participation in rural institutions and in decision-making at all levels. Malaysia also supported the recommendation in that same report that new development and poverty alleviation policies mainstreaming a gender perspective should be devised, in order to enable women to participate in all aspects of economic and social life.

22. Malaysia's development programmes envisaged the adoption of economic policies and development strategies that addressed the needs of women in poverty, including through the revision of certain laws and administrative practices and the development of research methods on the feminization of poverty. Its anti-poverty programmes, which were focused on the hard-core poor, particularly women, accorded priority to income-generating programmes.

23. Rural development programmes, especially the components aimed at women, sought to create a well-informed group capable of initiative and desirous of a better quality of life. They therefore primarily involved strengthening the family institution, developing a sustainable economy and building a quality infrastructure in rural areas, as well as establishing an institutional framework responsive to change. They also emphasized the health of rural women and their families, the medical, dental and maternal and child health care services in rural areas being particularly extensive.

24. Credit was used by the Malaysian Government as a further means of promoting the advancement of rural women. The "Ikhtiar" project currently provided such women with access to microcredit without the requirement of collateral. Other programmes enabled them to easily obtain loans from various public bodies.

25. Malaysian non-governmental organizations complemented the efforts of the Government to promote the status of women by organizing courses in various fields (including business, management, family health care, leadership development and promoting awareness of the contributions of women to national development).

26. As the secretariat of the Regional Steering Committee on the Economic Advancement of Rural and Island Women for Asia and the Pacific, his Government encouraged the preparation and implementation of specific regional and subregional activities such as the organization of training courses for rural women and the exchange of information and research on rural women.

27. **Ms. Kapalata** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on 11 October, and with the statement which would be delivered on 14 October by the representative of Mozambique on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In keeping with its commitments to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, her Government had given priority to four of the 12 critical areas of concern, namely, empowerment of women, political and legal empowerment of women through training and the revision of laws which discriminated against women, affirmative action which ensured women's participation in decision-making through their representation in Parliament, and alleviating the burden of poverty on women through access to microcredit and the promotion and strengthening of social services for women and children. In anticipation of the

special session in the year 2000, the Government would organize a nationwide workshop in March 2000 on International Women's Day, at which participants would be able to assess their performance in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.

28. The reports submitted on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action told a mixed story of gains and setbacks. In her country, as far as gains were concerned, the Government had adopted, in July 1998, the Sexual Offences Special Provisions, which criminalized such offences and female genital mutilation and prescribed stringent punishment. The adoption of that piece of legislation had had a profound effect on Tanzanian society; it had brought about changes in attitude towards sexual offences and had mitigated violence against women. Various laws that discriminated against women were being reviewed with a view to their abolition. The Land Law Act of 1999 established women's right to land ownership and thus gave them access to the means of production on which the majority of women depended.

29. With the special session of the General Assembly eight months away, it was evident that the most important objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, such as gender equality and the elimination of gender discrimination, had not yet been achieved. The reports of the Secretary-General indicated that women were still poorer than men, that their level of education was still lower than that of men, and that their health and nutritional status was still poorer than that of men. Since women were still disproportionately affected by economic crises, it was critical that novel ways of eradicating poverty should be considered at the special session. In that connection, the role of the Bretton Woods institutions and the political will of Governments acquired an added importance. The report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat indicated that, while some visible progress had been made, the goal of 50/50 gender distribution in the United Nations Secretariat would not be met by the year 2000.

30. Notwithstanding the drawbacks, it was imperative to seize the opportunity provided by the special session to reaffirm the international community's commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the new millennium. Her delegation wished to recognize the contribution by the United Nations system, in particular the Division for the Advancement of Women and UNIFEM, as well as the crucial role played by non-governmental organizations and civil society. The role of men should not be overlooked in that regard; their participation was critical to the successful implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

31. **Mr. Hadjiargyrou** (Cyprus) said that his country joined the international community in commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and welcomed the recent adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, which his Government intended to ratify as soon as possible. His delegation looked forward to the universal ratification of the Convention; it also looked forward to the special session of the General Assembly, to be held in June 2000, which would give a new impetus to the process that had been launched five years previously in Beijing.

32. Cyprus fully supported the important role of the specialized agencies and national and international non-governmental organizations in defining the problems faced by women worldwide and in assisting the work performed by the United Nations system. It also supported the networking at the international, regional and national levels as a means of mobilizing support and stimulating actions taken by Governments, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations for the purpose of enhancing visibility and empowering women in the social, economic and political spheres.

33. In the 25 years since the Turkish invasion, his Government had increasingly sought to integrate women into economic revival efforts. The role and status of Cypriot women had improved considerably since 1979. The high rates of economic growth that had taken place in the last two decades had led to the increased participation of women in the country's economic activity, which had led to the expansion and updating of family and labour law, increased public awareness of the specific problems of women and the pursuit of policies for the promotion of gender equality.

34. The number of women entering the labour market had been growing steadily; their level of education had improved and there were more and more women in high administrative and managerial positions.

35. Although rural women had benefited considerably from the various rural development programmes and had access to basic social services, the new programme launched by the Ministry of Agriculture aimed at improving the status of rural women by promoting their role in farming and encouraging them to undertake income-generating activities.

36. Violence against women had become a top priority issue within the Government's overall policy on equality. Preventive and therapeutic programmes had been

implemented and in-service training was organized for social workers to enable them to offer the right support to the victims of violence. The Ministry of Justice and Public Order provided financial support in that area to women's organizations and non-governmental organizations to initiate their own programmes.

37. Cyprus was strongly committed to pursuing policies and programmes which ensured that women fully enjoyed their basic rights and were treated as equal partners in shaping the country's economic, political and social development.

38. **Mr. Niehaus** (Costa Rica) said that the improvement of the status of women was an obligation which stemmed from the dignity and fundamental rights of women. However, in view of the fact that women continued to suffer from oppression, intolerance and discrimination, concrete and effective measures must be adopted to stamp out those injustices and ensure that women actually participated in all decision-making processes.

39. In Costa Rica, which was an agricultural country, women accounted for 40 per cent of agricultural production and were increasingly employed in the production of non-traditional export crops. However, the steady decline in commodity terms of trade led to a decline in the earnings not only of rural women but also of developing countries, thereby hampering their capacity to make investments that would enhance the status of rural women. It was therefore vital to modify the world economic order in the interest of greater justice.

40. With regard to the status of rural women, mention should be made of the situation of households headed by women, who provided for a large number of children and old people. The improvement of the social, occupational and economic conditions of those women would therefore have an impact on a sizeable segment of society which was particularly vulnerable to economic and social crises.

41. Costa Rica had enacted a number of specific provisions with a view to the implementation of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Those measures included the establishment of a national women's institute directed by a minister for the status of women, a recommendation by the electoral commission inviting political parties to reserve 40 per cent of elective posts for women, and the establishment of a national women's hospital.

42. His delegation stressed the need to combat sexism and all other forms of discrimination and to struggle for equality and unity in diversity.

43. **Ms. Garruq** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that despite the efforts of the international community to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, the status of women had not really progressed appreciably because of the economic and social problems experienced by the developing countries, particularly the least developed countries. Rural women were the first to suffer from such problems.

44. While States had primary responsibility for the implementation of the Platform for Action, a favourable environment was needed to support the efforts of developing countries. In that respect, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya supported the ministerial communiqué adopted at the high-level segment of the 1999 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council which called upon United Nations bodies to support national poverty eradication efforts, with particular attention to employment creation.

45. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya welcomed the efforts made by the United Nations and various programmes to combat all forms of discrimination against women.

46. The implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action began with the education given to children within the family itself, which should not be a place of confrontation between men and women.

47. The Commission on the Status of Women should be commended on the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", at which the progress made since the Beijing Conference would be evaluated and obstacles encountered would be identified with a view to their elimination.

48. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya had adopted many legislative and administrative measures to promote the status of women and combat sex discrimination in many fields, including employment, politics, decision-making, health and education.

49. **Mr. Baali** (Algeria) said that the celebration in 1999 of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which constituted a charter for the mainstreaming of women, coincided by a few weeks with the advent of the third millennium, but traditional behaviours and mentalities were still depriving hundreds of millions of women of their basic rights.

50. The record of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action showed that, at both the national and international levels, women were being afforded equal opportunities in all spheres of activity and there had

been a slight improvement in the status of women in the countries of the South. Thus, the United Nations system and intergovernmental bodies such as the Commission on the Status of Women acting as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly in June 2000 had proved their worth.

51. Among the areas for which new initiatives could be formulated at the special session were education and training for women (two thirds of the world's illiterates were women), women and poverty (the phenomenon of the feminization of poverty was growing and was linked, particularly in the rural areas of Africa, to food security for the family), and the welfare and education of young girls.

52. It was in Africa that the status of women was the most precarious because of the continent's multidimensional problems, by which women were the first to be affected: the incidence of armed conflicts, chronic underdevelopment, extreme poverty, the shortage or even absence of basic social services, illiteracy, and AIDS (four out of five HIV-positive women in the world were African). The international community therefore needed to provide moral and material support to Africa and African women and help them achieve the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action. In that respect, the sixth regional conference to be held at Addis Ababa in November 1999 would provide an opportunity to evaluate the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing programmes of action and, no doubt, to plan new initiatives.

53. Since the Beijing Conference, in which it had fully participated, Algeria had worked to follow up on the Declaration and Platform for Action. It had formulated a wide-ranging national plan and mobilized substantial resources in order to invest in basic social programmes, improvement of the quality of basic education and occupational training for women and girls and prevention of school abandonment, maintenance of the basic principles of social justice, equity and solidarity on which national health policy was based, implementation of incentives for the maintenance and strengthening of provisions in the area of employment, inclusion of rural women in the agricultural development policy, and strengthening of the presence of women in the economic sphere.

54. Two recent developments should be noted: the appointment of the first woman prefect (wali); and the submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in January 1999 of the initial report of Algeria on the implementation of the Convention, which that Committee had received very favourably, which would definitely encourage the public authorities and women's associations to further promote the mainstreaming of Algerian women (requiring a revision of the Family Code).

55. **Ms. Korneliouk** (Belarus) said that the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the adoption, fully supported by Belarus, of the Optional Protocol to that instrument, made 1999 an important year for women.

56. In Belarus, women, who represented 53 per cent of the population, constituted the largest socio-demographic group and, unfortunately, the group which suffered the most from the adverse consequences of the period of transition. In line with the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Belarus had drawn up a national plan of action 1996-2000 with a view to improving the situation of women, and a programme entitled "Women of the Republic of Belarus", which the council of ministers had approved in June and in August 1996, respectively. Belarus was one of the few countries which had responded to the questionnaire of the United Nations Secretariat on the review and implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and had made proposals on action to be taken in the future.

57. In order to deal with unemployment, which was certainly the worst of the problems affecting women, Belarus drew up employment programmes every year which contained various measures to improve the situation of women in the job market. Poverty, which was increasingly affecting women, was a relatively new social phenomenon in Belarus; it was the consequence of the series of economic and social reforms undertaken in the country as well as of the Chernobyl disaster. That was why it was important that national efforts should be supported by the international community, and particularly the United Nations.

58. While welcoming the progress achieved in the area of parity between the sexes in the United Nations Secretariat, and the personal interest the Secretary-General had in the question, as well as his keenness to establish a new management structure, the Government of Belarus deplored the slow pace of the entire complex process.

59. It welcomed the work done by the Commission on the Status of Women as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly and underlined the need from the outset to organize informal consultations open to all in order to facilitate the adoption by consensus of the decisions which the Commission would be taking at its forty-fourth session. It also supported the Commission's decision to establish a system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women for the period 2002-2005, which was centred on specific actions. He noted with satisfaction that

to the section of its agreed conclusions on "institutional mechanisms" the Commission on the Status of Women had encouraged the multilateral development institutions, bilateral donors and international non-governmental organizations to provide technical assistance and other resources, including financial resources, to the developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

60. **Ms. Wodie** (Australia) said that the fundamental principle that women and men should enjoy all human rights equally had been articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and several other international instruments, among them the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In spite of the great strides that had been taken to advance women's rights, the task was not complete. The international community's commitment to equal rights for women had been demonstrated by the fact that the Convention was among the most widely ratified of all human rights treaties. That commitment had been reaffirmed at the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993, and at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing in 1995.

61. On the occasion of the Convention's twentieth anniversary, the General Assembly of the United Nations had adopted an Optional Protocol which provided for a communications procedure and an inquiry mechanism. The fact that all parties to the negotiations process, in which Australia had participated, had adopted the Optional Protocol by consensus showed that the international community continued to recognize the importance of women's fundamental rights within the United Nations human rights system. Australia would undertake extensive consultations on the Optional Protocol involving the Federal Parliament, State and Territory Governments and civil society, such consultations being an obligatory procedure before Australia could become a party to a new treaty.

62. Since signing the Convention in 1980 and ratifying it in 1983, Australia had put in place specialized machinery of Government at federal and local levels which advised on issues relating to the status of women and evaluated the outcome for women of government policies and programmes. The objective of those policies was to ensure that women were able to make their own choices and have an equal opportunity to achieve their individual objectives.

63. In December 1998 Australia had signed the Statute of the International Criminal Court, having worked hard to ensure that the crimes of rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution and other forms of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict were incorporated into the definition of "war crimes" in the Statute.

64. The tragic situations in East Timor and Kosovo had provided Australia with the opportunity to take practical action to protect women. Of the more than 1,500 East Timorese refugees who had been evacuated to Australia, 52 per cent were women, and a large proportion of the 4,000 Kosovars given temporary safe haven in Australia were women and children separated from their families. Australia welcomed the opportunity presented by the forthcoming special session in June 2000 for the international community to review progress made over the past five years in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. The Australian Government was currently conducting consultations on the special session with interested individuals and non-governmental organizations.

65. Australia had a long history of commitment to the objectives of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Violence against women was a crime against the whole of society. The Government had taken decisive steps to confront the problem by making all forms of physical and sexual violence against women criminal offences and by launching a campaign to eliminate domestic violence through the "partnerships against domestic violence" initiative, which was underpinned by a financial commitment of 50 million Australian dollars from the national Government up to June 2001. It had also introduced strategies aimed at eradicating the practice of female genital mutilation which existed among some ethnic communities in Australia. Those strategies were aimed both at supporting women who had been mutilated and at preventing the mutilation of girls who were at risk.

66. Australia had promulgated a law on sexual tourism providing means to enable the prosecution of Australians who escaped the criminal justice system of the country in which the offence had been committed. The Australian Government had signed memoranda of understanding with the Governments of Fiji and the Philippines which directly supported the child sex tourism legislation. It had also developed strong law enforcement links with many other countries in the region, including Thailand and Indonesia, in order to tackle child abuse and bring offenders to justice.

67. It was important that the United Nations could deploy robust and uncompromising advocates of women's rights. Australia believed that women's issues should be integrated into all United Nations human rights mechanisms. There was too wide a gap between the specialized and mainstream mechanisms. In particular, Australia emphasized the importance of an effective partnership between the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights.

68. Although it was disappointing that the goal of gender equality in the United Nations was not going to be achieved by the year 2000, Australia welcomed the Secretary-General's commitment to achieving gender equality in the Secretariat as set out in his latest report on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/54/487). It welcomed in particular the work to develop human resources management action plans for individual departments and offices in order to improve gender balance in tandem with other aspects of human resources management. Effective collaboration between the Office of Human Resources Management and the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women was an important element in the ongoing efforts to achieve gender equality. Australia welcomed the United Nations initiatives to introduce gender-sensitivity training at the departmental level and encouraged the establishment of effective monitoring mechanisms to ensure the active commitment of all managers to the promotion and recruitment of suitably qualified women, particularly for positions at the D-1 level and above. It was important for Member States and the United Nations to continue their efforts to identify suitably qualified women for positions throughout the United Nations system, including posts as special representatives of the Secretary-General.

69. **Mr. dos Santos** (Mozambique), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that, 20 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, major strides had been made in women's human rights. SADC welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention at the current session.

70. Although efforts had been made to ensure parity between men and women within the United Nations system, it was regrettable that with the approach of the year 2000, that goal had not been reached. In particular, more women from the African region should be recruited.

71. The implementation of the Gender and Development Declaration and the Plan of Action which the SADC Heads of State had adopted in 1997 and 1998 respectively, had led to some progress in the participation of women in the decision-making process, particularly in parliaments and Governments. The SADC successors responsible for the advancement of women had adopted a regional programme of action which identified the actions required to reach the target of 30 per cent of women in decision-making posts. The SADC Heads of State had endorsed that objective and had undertaken to strengthen the presence of women in their cabinets. They had also signed an addendum to the Gender and Development Declaration on eradicating violence against women and children.

72. In other sectors, however, the situation had not improved significantly for women, who still had difficulties in gaining access to capital, land and technology. The provisions adopted by SADC to benefit women, for example affirmative action policies by lending institutions, were impeded by lack of funds. SADC therefore appealed to the international community to assist it in implementing programmes for the empowerment of women.

73. In some SADC countries, the health status of women and children was very poor, not only because of malnutrition, but also because of high levels of HIV/AIDS, which were affecting the economically active members of the population. SADC leaders were engaged in the search for a solution.

74. A few months before the high-level review at which the General Assembly would assess the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, efforts tended to be redoubled and commitments renewed. Rather than re-negotiating the Platform for Action, it was essential to take stock and work for its complete implementation.

75. Although the SADC countries intended to fulfil their responsibilities, they could not implement the Platform for Action on their own, in view of the economic difficulties which they faced. In that respect, foreign direct investment and official development assistance should be increased.

76. The SADC countries, which would continue to support the preparatory process, took the view that the special session of the General Assembly should enable Governments, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations to reaffirm their commitment to work for equality between women and men. SADC believed that there could be no sustainable development without the participation of women and men as equal partners, and reaffirmed its commitment to work for the advancement of women.

77. **Mr. Kamikia** (Fiji) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. After the Fourth World Conference on Women, at which the international community had undertaken to work for the empowerment of women and their enjoyment of their human rights, it was necessary, at the dawn of a new millennium, to take stock of the steps taken.

78. For his Government, the empowerment of women was an economic and political necessity which should contribute, through increased participation of women in political, social

and economic activities, to the prosperity of the whole community.

79. His Government agreed with Mr. Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary-General, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, that the question of the empowerment of women was closely linked with the bigger issues of poverty, unemployment and underemployment. Since poverty was disproportionately female, any strategy to eradicate it must be based on the empowerment of women. The implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action required resources which had not been made available by the economic liberalization and globalization processes, because developing countries, particularly small island developing States, had not benefited from those processes. Moreover, official development assistance, which played an important role in the development of countries like Fiji, was continuing to decline. The international community must therefore create an enabling international economic environment so that developing countries could fulfil their commitments.

80. Apart from a Ministry of Women, Culture and Social Welfare, the Government of Fiji had put in place a plan of action for women to ensure gender parity in a number of government institutions, promote safe domestic and work environments for women, finance small business development projects and review legislation.

81. The Government of Fiji had decided to withdraw its reservations concerning articles 7 (a) and 9 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

82. In his Government's view, the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action would be achievable if the international community supported the efforts of small island developing States such as Fiji to gain access to markets, technology and the necessary skills.

83. **Ms. Otim** (Uganda) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Rural and urban women in Uganda were subjected to a number of problems which they could not control, such as hunger, the lack of family planning, high-risk pregnancy and HIV/AIDS. Rural women had only rudimentary means of working the land, most of which they did not own, and had no access to capital. In addition, cultural practices exposed women to physical violence, early marriage and polygamy.

84. It was therefore not surprising that the participants in the first Organization of African Unity (OAU) Ministerial Conference on Human Rights in Africa had appealed to all African States to take steps to eliminate discrimination against women and to promote the advancement of women. Those objectives were also pursued by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women.

85. In order to mainstream gender concerns as a means of accelerating social, political and economic development, the Ugandan authorities had taken a number of affirmative-action measures to promote women's participation in public life. For example, the 1995 Constitution, which recognized the equality of men and women, provided for mandatory positions for women in local governments.

86. Women in civil society had played an active role in that movement by forming organizations which advocated better health standards, the provision of safe water, education for girls and family planning, and which ran programmes to provide microcredit, prevent HIV/AIDS, provide shelter for battered women and train local women councillors to deal with women's problems.

87. In implementing policies for the advancement of women, Uganda had benefited from the work of United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). She hoped that the many efforts being made would lead to the realization of all the goals established.

88. **Mr. Jong Myong Hak** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that, despite the international community's efforts, since the establishment of the United Nations, to promote equality between women and men, the problem of inequality remained serious in many countries, where women suffered from social ills such as poverty, unemployment, disease, illiteracy, discrimination and violence.

89. Efforts to ensure respect for the fundamental rights of women must go beyond the adoption of legislation to include concrete measures to ensure their equal participation in political, economic and social development, *inter alia* by making the investments necessary for the advancement of women. His Government guaranteed women's participation in all areas of activity through investments and practical measures such as the operation, at State expense, of day-care centres in all workplaces and the introduction of special rules on women's working hours.

90. The promotion of gender equality had benefited from the valuable support of United Nations agencies and programmes such as UNIFEM, UNFPA and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

(UNESCO), which promoted, inter alia, women's health and education throughout the world.

41. Violence against women was a grave and systematic violation of women's human rights. To stop it, States must establish strong punitive measures, sensitize their citizens to the problem from an early age and enact legal standards guaranteeing equality between women and men in all sectors of public life. The settlement of past crimes was also important. In that connection, his delegation urged the Government of Japan to apologize for having committed grave violations of human rights by subjecting "comfort women" to sexual slavery before and during the Second World War and to offer appropriate compensation, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

42. His delegation was convinced that the situation of women would improve when all Governments made practical efforts to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea would continue to work towards the realization of the goals and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the Beijing Platform for Action.

43. Mr. Al-Dulaymi (Iraq) said that the Iraqi Government had adopted all appropriate legislative measures to ensure the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, in particular by promulgating the 1987 Reform Act, which was designed to promote equality in Iraqi society.

44. Iraq was a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and had been one of the first countries to establish a national strategy for the advancement of women, which had been submitted to the Secretary-General in mid-1987 and would certainly make a contribution to the formulation of an action plan for the advancement of women in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres.

45. The special session of the General Assembly to be held in June 2000 would give the international community an opportunity to assess the progress made since the Beijing Conference and to consider the obstacles to the implementation of the Platform for Action, which was based primarily on national initiatives.

46. The countries whose economic and social development was being impeded, in particular by economic blockades, had to cope with big obstacles in the implementation of the Platform for Action. For example, the blockade imposed on Iraq over the past nine years had had extremely damaging effects on the status of Iraqi women, who had not only been forced to withdraw from public life in order to provide for the daily needs of their families but had also seen their health deteriorate as a result of malnutrition and disease (50 per cent of pregnant women were anaemic, and the maternal mortality rate had risen from 26 to 170 per 100,000 in recent years).

47. That situation ran counter to the decisions adopted at the big international conferences on women, which called on the international community to improve the status of women, and was inconsistent with the Beijing Platform for Action, which stressed the need for action to be taken in accordance with international law to reduce the impact of economic sanctions on women and children. Iraq therefore supported the lifting of the blockade.

48. Ms. Ankersloot (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that ILO regarded gender equality at jobs as central to poverty eradication and sustainable development. In many societies women bore the brunt of poverty and were particularly vulnerable to the fluctuations and inequities of the labour market. Data were very often not disaggregated by sex, and ILO was therefore trying to develop better gender-disaggregated labour market indicators and to assess the differential impact of development policies on men and women. In line with its mandate, ILO aimed to reduce the discrimination suffered by women through three types of action.

49. Firstly, with regard to the setting of international labour standards, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the ILO Conventions had a common basis in the same principles and were complementary and mutually reinforcing. ILO believed that the ratification of the Conventions by Member States provided vital support for gender equality at work, and it welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly of the Optional Protocol to the Convention. It was collaborating with UNIFEM and the Division for the Advancement of Women with a view to promoting action to help women workers, for instance by collaborating closely on the preparation of the report of the 1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Globalization, Gender and Work.

50. Secondly, ILO had played the lead role in preparing for the high-level segment discussion in the Economic and Social Council on the role of employment and work in poverty eradication and the empowerment and advancement of women. It was also working with Governments and employers' and workers' organizations with a view to launching programmes for creating sustainable jobs in micro and small enterprises which were targeted at women entrepreneurs in developing and transitional economies. In

post-conflict situations. ILO recognized the importance of jobs creation for women as well as for former combatants, for women's lives were often seriously dislocated by war and they bore the greatest burden in the reconstruction work.

131. A key part of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by ILO was its global programme on more and better jobs for women. The programme was designed to reduce the vulnerability of women in the labour market, especially in precarious informal work where social security was non-existent or inadequate. It also stressed the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. The ILO projects aimed to mobilize women, who often suffered the greatest hardships but were also the best agents for mitigating the consequences of economic and social dislocation, financial crisis, conflicts or natural disasters.

132. Thirdly, where working conditions and social protection were concerned, the lack of protection mechanisms made women and children particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. That was why ILO established standards for improving workplace conditions and helped to formulate national policies for application of those standards, which included occupational safety and health standards for women workers designed to eliminate hazards for pregnant and lactating women and reduce the stress caused by long hours, monotonous tasks and sexual harassment. They were also intended to guarantee freedom of association and the right to organize and bargain collectively. The most recent ILO *World Employment Report (1998-99)* had highlighted the importance of training and had focused particularly on "Women and training in the global economy". Appropriate labour market legislation was critical and must take account of women's need for flexibility, special protection for maternity and child care, and the elimination of inequality of opportunity and treatment between women and men workers.

133. Physical or psychological violence in the workplace was a global and very extensive phenomenon: according to a recent worldwide survey by ILO, women were particularly vulnerable. Some workplaces and occupations were "high-risk", and women were concentrated in that type of job as domestic servants, teachers, nurses and shop workers. The survey report provided information and analyses for policy makers, employers' and workers' organizations, and corporate officials. It proposed dialogue and initiatives to regulate violence in the workplace and stressed the need for gender-sensitive legislation, immediate intervention, and measures to provide long-term assistance for victims.

134. In June 1998 the International Labour Conference had adopted the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, in which member States made a renewed commitment to respect, promote and apply the following principles: freedom to bargain collectively; elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour; effective abolition of child labour; and elimination of discrimination in employment. Each of those principles helped to safeguard and promote the fundamental rights of women workers.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.